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AN IMPORTANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

The keenness with which excavations have been undertaken in Palestine during the last ten years makes Father Vincent's¹ detailed and synthetic record—the first of its kind—a valuable and welcome contribution to biblical research. The earlier labors of Flinders Petrie and F. J. Bliss at Tell el-Hesi (Lachish), of Bliss and Macalister in the Shephelah (including Tell es-Safi, perhaps Gath), of Macalister at Gezer, Ernst Sellin at Taanach, and of G. Schumacher at Tell el-Mutesellim (Megiddo) have brought an accumulation of archaeological evidence, the significance and lasting value of which could scarcely be appreciated until the whole had been re-examined and grouped by an expert hand. The ability of Father Hugues Vincent of the Frères Prêcheurs to perform this task is undeniable. His extensive knowledge of archaeological data is seen in his unceasing range for illustrative material from Elam and Susa to Carthage, from Asia Minor, Greece, Crete, and Cyprus to Egypt; he has, in addition, an admirable sobriety of judgment—the highest qualification in research of this kind—and he exercises a wise reserve in the treatment of questions which are the subject of controversy and debate. It is a distinct advantage also, that he has a first-hand acquaintance with the actual conditions of life in the land with which he is dealing, and he is fortunate in possessing among his colleagues specialists in studies upon which archaeological research is necessarily dependent. In a word, it would not be easy to find a writer more fitted for the work; it would perhaps be impossible to obtain a more successful result considering the various difficulties with which the author has had to contend.

A brief introduction (pp. 1–22) describes the history of the excavations, and explains archaeological methods and the stratification of ruins. To avoid overloading the work the author has set for his lower limit the close of the Jewish period in the fifth century (i. e., before the Seleucid Age), and has reserved for a future occasion the excavations at Jerusalem, which have chiefly topographical importance. The first chapter deals at length with the ancient sites: their situation, fortification, materials, private houses, etc. Chaps. ii–iv (pp. 90–284) discuss in detail the evidence relating to places of worship, idols, objects of cult, religious practices, burial customs and beliefs, etc. The treatment of ceramics (chap. v, pp. 297–360) is technically the most important section in the book, since, apart from the intrinsic interest of Palestinian pottery, Petrie's demonstra-

¹ *Canaan d'après l'exploration récente*. Par Père Hugues Vincent, professor of biblical archaeology at Saint-Etienne, Jerusalem. Paris: Lecoffre, 1907. 488 pages. Fr. 15.

tion of its value in determining the relative dates of the various strata has been proved by subsequent research to be substantially correct. A chapter on prehistoric archaeology provides a careful summary of the geological formation of Palestine and reviews the evidence for paleolithic and neolithic man. This is continued in the concluding essay (pp. 427 ff.) where Vincent sketches the early history of Canaan in the light of archaeology and the monuments from the age when the neolithic inhabitants were overrun by the Semites to the time when the Israelites appear in complete possession of the land.

The book is a solid piece of reading, full of the most valuable information, simplified by useful summaries which enable the student to follow the trend of the evidence, and elucidated by eleven plates and three hundred and ten well-chosen illustrations. One could wish, however, that cross-references had been more liberally introduced. The book does not of course claim to be either complete or final. Schumacher's brief reports will have to be superseded by the promised memoir on Megiddo, the excavation of Gezer is still in hand, and fresh sites are being or are to be opened. On the other hand, it is only necessary to compare Vincent's book with the works of Perrot and Chipiez, Babelon, Benzinger, or Nowack to realize the very great advance which Palestinian archaeology has made in the last few years; and Father Vincent repeatedly warns the reader that future research may solve or at least illuminate this or that problem, and recognizes that many questions concern the historian or student of comparative religion rather than the archaeologist. One cannot appreciate too highly his careful distinction between material remains and the precise interpretation which is to be placed upon them; much confusion has been caused in the past by arrogant claims made in behalf of archaeology, and the unsuspecting reader has often assumed that the construction which writers have placed upon archaeological discoveries was as real and objective as the precious "finds" themselves. Father Vincent, however, has not failed to realize the limitations of our present-day knowledge, and it can safely be said that the future will not nullify the conclusions that are based upon his comprehensive survey of the available evidence.

As the land in which the Old Testament took shape continues to reveal its secrets, the history of the past, which its writers have left us, reappears in a new light. From a number of independent data (cuneiform tablets, scarabs, pottery, etc.) it is possible to distinguish certain characteristic archaeological periods. There is the period marked by cuneiform tablets of the Amarna age (fifteenth to the fourteenth century, B. C.) and by Aegean pottery-types. It is preceded by an indigenous culture which admits of being

subdivided into pre-Semitic and Semitic ages. Subsequently, however, the Aegean pottery disappears and Cypriote and early and late Greek ware carry us down by successive stages to the Seleucidan era. By a careful comparison of types and strata—the evidence as in literary criticism is cumulative—the archaeologist arrives at conclusions which are approximately correct, leaving it for more complete evidence to simplify the problems which remain. There are, in fact, many complex questions which arise from a consideration of the various spheres of external influence (e. g., the too exclusive use of “Aegean”); but they are mainly technical, and there is no reason to suppose that the future will do other than confirm the very gradual development of earlier features which excavators have been unanimous in recognizing (see pp. 18 ff.).

Should one hesitate between conflicting views of the character of the Israelite immigration, it will be found that the excavations speak with no ambiguous voice, and the conclusions which Sellin was able to draw from his labors at Taanach continue to be completely substantiated.² The evidence shows no sudden movement progressive or retrograde in the history of the pottery (p. 345); the sepulchers reveal no sensible innovations (p. 225); the high places still flourish (p. 151); objects of heathen cult persist (pp. 161 ff.), and even foundation-sacrifice is not unknown in the latter part of the monarchy (pp. 199 ff.). There is, in general, only a gradual evolution without any trace of the interruption which would necessarily have been produced had there been a violent substitution of Israelites in the place of the exterminated Canaanites (p. 464); this evolution “est la plus directe confirmation que pouvaient apporter les fouilles au schéma historique de la conquête tel qu’on peut le tracer d’après la Bible” (*ibid.*; also pp. 204, 461, note 3).

Father Vincent does not write as an Old Testament critic; he has confined himself to the archaeology; he has collected and discussed the facts; he has left it for others to determine their bearing upon the critical study of the Old Testament. And the evidence has made it ever more unmistakable that it is the work of *scientific* research, not to trace the religion and history of Israel within the chronological limits of the Sacred Writings, but to view these records in the light of all external knowledge. All critical study of the Old Testament—as distinct from the injudicious or indiscriminate selection of heterogeneous data—will henceforth be obliged to consider the

² See his *Tell Ta'annek* (1904), p. 102, and his *Ertrag der Ausgrabungen im Orient f. d. Erkenntnis d. Entwicklung d. Religion Israels* (1905), pp. 33 ff. One may note also Macalister's remarks, *Quarterly Statement of the Palestine Exploration Fund* (1904), p. 123; and *ibid.* (1907), p. 203; George Adam Smith, *ibid.* (1905), pp. 287 ff.

evidence which has now been made readily accessible for the first time, and two features in particular merit careful study. First, archaeology has quite independently proved that there was a development in Israelite religion—the appeal has often been made to archaeology; its verdict could scarcely be more explicit. But it is clear that the reconstructions, that is to say, the attempts which have been made to sketch the development historically from the Mosaic to the post-exilic age, are not final, and a re-examination of the problem seems necessary. Secondly, it is undoubtedly useful in a textbook such as Vincent's to bring the archaeological evidence into touch with biblical history, and especially with that period where the Israelites appear upon the scene. But it is the work of historical criticism to investigate the traditions which prevailed among the Israelites themselves regarding their origin and the two distinct bodies of evidence (material remains and written traditions) must be surveyed critically and independently. Through a failure to observe this principle it has been found necessary in the past to adjust or modify certain conclusions which arose from the very natural inclination to bring archaeological results into line with the biblical traditions as they stand. From the archaeological standpoint alone it is doubtful whether it is justifiable to distinguish a "Canaanite" from an "early Israelite" period. No radical differences seem to sever the culture of the Amarna period from that of several centuries later, and the problem of the growth of Israel's culture, religion, and historical traditions cannot ultimately be separated from the more comprehensive problem of the general history of ancient Palestine itself.

There are many interesting questions of detail upon which I have no space to enter—questions which concern both the lay reader and the professed student. However, those who are opposed to modern criticism will scarcely fail to see that the inquiry into the origin of the Old Testament is necessitated by external evidence alone, while others will perceive that the study grows more intricate and the preparation for specialist research becomes more arduous as our horizon is widened from time to time by fresh discoveries. The admirable picture of the Palestinian background which Father Hugues Vincent has drawn is one which every serious student should assimilate, and one may venture to express the conviction that his volume will have a profound effect upon future research in directing attention to the important factors which have influenced Israel's career.

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